

Program Summary
Department of Emergency and Military Affairs
Project Challenge

Program Overview

Project Challenge, an educational program for at-risk youth, is administered by the Department of Emergency and Military Affairs (DEMA).

To be eligible to apply to Project Challenge, a potential applicant must meet the following criteria, which has been developed by the National Guard Bureau:

- between the ages of 16-18
- U.S. citizen or permanent U.S. resident
- resident of Arizona
- pass a drug test
- high school dropout
- no prior felony convictions
- not on probation or parole
- no pending legal action
- unemployed

Prospective students must volunteer for the program. Federal law prohibits using Project Challenge as an alternate sentencing program or Court referrals of students to the program. Two full-time recruiters work with high school guidance counselors, teachers, ministers, and probation officers to locate potential applicants.

The program hosts approximately 100 students per class and holds 2 classes per year. Students who are admitted to the program do not pay any tuition or fees for enrollment in Project Challenge.

Since its inception in 1993, the Project Challenge curriculum has had a duration of 17 months, which is divided into a 5-month residential phase and a 12-month mentoring phase.

The residential phase is completed in a quasi-military environment at a facility located in Queen Creek, where students receive instruction in academics, career planning, citizenship, community service, health and hygiene, leadership, life skills, and physical training. Most students will earn their General Equivalency Diploma while enrolled in the program.

There are a total of 7 buildings on campus, 2 being temporarily leased modular buildings. Two buildings are used for operation and administration, 3 buildings are used as residences, and 2 buildings are used for classrooms. The total square footage of all buildings

on campus is 30,212. Cafeteria services are provided through an agreement with the neighboring Boy's Ranch facility.

Project Challenge has a total staff of 55, which includes 6 teachers, 4 counselors, 15 administrative staff, and 30 cadre personnel, who provide training and constant supervision. The program did not provide requested information concerning current student to teacher ratios.

During the mentoring phase each student is paired with an adult volunteer to assist the student in accomplishing their self-improvement goals made during the residential phase.

Each mentor must meet the following criteria:

- same gender as the student
- over 24 years old
- can not live in the same household as the student
- not an immediate family member

In addition, mentors are required to submit fingerprints and must pass a background check. Approximately 100 volunteers are required for each class to serve as mentors for Project Challenge students.

Mentors are required to attend a 4-hour training session before the student enters into the mentoring phase, and students are required to attend a 3-hour mentor orientation session.

During the mentoring phase, the mentors are expected to meet with students twice monthly, and are also to contact students at least 2 times each month either by telephone or e-mail. Each month the mentor reports to Project Challenge on the number of contacts with the student and on the student's progress in achieving academic and employment goals.

Program Funding

Project Challenge receives funding from 2 sources: the state General Fund and the Project Challenge Grant, a federal matching fund which provides funding based on a 60% federal/40% state share agreement. However, the state's share of funding has exceeded its 40% minimum requirement in order to pay for an additional 5.5 FTE Positions.

In FY 2006, the program received funding in the amount of \$3,280,200. This represents an increase of 6.2% over the FY 2001 amount. *Table 1* below displays funding information for Project Challenge by fund source for FY 2001, 2005, and 2006.

Table 1			
Project Challenge Funding History			
<u>Fund</u>	<u>FY 2001</u>	<u>FY 2005</u>	<u>FY 2006</u>
GF	\$1,400,000	\$1,550,700	\$1,592,200
Federal	<u>1,688,000</u>	<u>1,688,000</u>	<u>1,688,000</u>
Total	\$3,088,000	\$3,238,700	\$3,280,200

Performance Measures

The only measure used by the department to assess the performance of Project Challenge is the percentage of graduates who are either employed or pursuing an education. DEMA tracks this information for a period of one year after completion of the program. This measure is included in the General Appropriation Act and is shown in *Table 2* below.

Project Challenge has consistently met or exceeded its goal of placing 95% of its graduates in the workforce or in institutes of higher education.

To better evaluate the performance of the program, DEMA could consider adding a performance measure which monitors the average number of mentor visits per month. The department could also track graduates for longer than a year to better determine the long-term effect of the program.

Additionally, the department may also consider adding a performance measure to track the percentage of entrants who graduate from the program, the percentage of favorable student evaluations, the average cost of the program per student, the percentage of students who demonstrate academic progress of 20% or more, the number of students who earn a General Equivalency Diploma, and the number of students who attend the program each year.

Table 2		
Project Challenge Performance Measure		
<u>Performance Measure</u>	<u>FY 2004 Actual</u>	<u>FY 2006 Estimate</u>
Percent of graduates who are either employed or in school (1 year after graduation)	96	95